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ULTIMA THULE.

IN THREE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.

FAR in the bosom of the North Sea, unvisited as yet by the wandering tourist—lying brown, and bare, and shored with frowning precipices, lashed by the ceaseless waters of a wild and tempestuous ocean—are stretched those hundred irregular and jagged islands which compose the group of the Shetlands. The Romans, when gazing on their nearest and highest mountains, from the green slopes of the Orkneys, were told, among other things, that they were named *Fouli*. Mistaking the word, as was not unnatural, when heard for the first time from the lips of barbarian islanders, it became *Thule* in their speech, and formed in their belief the utmost boundary of the world; which, for nearly three centuries, from its discovery by Agricola, 84 A.D., to its invasion by Theodosius, 368 A.D., neither thirst of knowledge nor of conquest were able to tempt them to approach. When, in the third century, Solinus is found writing of the now cultivated Orkneys, that ‘they were devoid of human inhabitants, had no trees, bristled with coarse grass, and presented a dreary expanse of rocks and deserts,’ it is not surprising that his countrymen felt little inducement to brave the terrors of the wild sea, that for nearly one hundred miles rolled between them and these cloud-capt mountains to the east. This mystery has long been cleared up. The quarry at which the eagles of Rome dared not fly, may now be reached weekly from Edinburgh, by a magnificently appointed steamer, in something like forty hours; and we propose soliciting the company of our readers in a short excursion thither, as to a region with which, in all probability, they are little acquainted; whose very existence, from its being stuck up by itself in a square corner to the west of the map of Scotland, the schoolboy is inclined to regard as a myth of fanciful geographers, for which they have not dared to assign any fixed locality; but whose scenery, traditions, and manners present to the curious traveller, wearied with the uniformity of more fertile and familiar lands, subjects of novel and striking interest.

When you awake with the bright sun streaming in at your port-hole window; when the sound of straining timbers, and the rising and falling upon pitiless and interminable waves, has at last subsided; when, after the hastiest possible toilet, you rush gladly and gratefully upon deck, and discover, from the bustle of boats and bawling of boatmen, that the perils of the voyage at length are over, the first glance on the

scene gives you that feeling of novelty which amply repays the journey. These calm blue waters in which you float are the Sound of Bressay, where Her Majesty’s navy might ride without crowding, and find, from its southern to its northern entrance—a distance of five miles—water deep enough for its largest vessels to swim in. Even now, in this summer morning, it has a little fleet in it. These vast Leviathans, each with a white cask—the crow’s nest—at its mainmast head, are whalers, returned from the Greenland fishing; and you may climb to the frail aerie, if you please, and fancy the feelings of the watch there, when looking through storm and cold from its dizzy eminence over the dreary ice-fields they have left. These jaunty war-steamer, with the tri-colour of France, Holland, and Belgium floating in the morning air, are the guardians of the innumerable fishing-boats from those countries, that spread themselves so thickly on every side that you could almost step by them to the shore. Yonder Spanish vessel—whose consort we passed wrecked half an hour ago, close by the Unicorn Rock, where the good ship of that name, belonging to Kirkaldy of Grange, met its fate, when pursuing Bothwell, the fierce husband of Mary—has come for a cargo of fish for fast-days; and that town, sweeping in semi-circle round the water’s edge, is Lerwick, the Shetland capital. A strange, gray, cold-looking place it is. Its narrow gables, crowned with their tall chimneys, are seen, even more conspicuously than in Kirkwall, the Orcadian metropolis, to face all to the sea, and give a bristling stickleback aspect to the whole place, which seems to say to the stranger: ‘You shall never peep in at my windows; if there is contraband within, there is no reason that you should see it.’

Be it so; there is not much now, we know, compared to former days, when those square holes towards the water, and that little landing-stair with which every house is provided, received many a cargo that was never reported at the custom-house. But let us land. This is the main street, and the only one. What a curiosity! paved wholly with broad flags; here ten feet wide, there six; never running for twenty yards in a straight line, and turning off at the sharpest zigzags; contracting occasionally to so narrow a passage, that two bailies could not walk abreast on it; and sending up from time to time narrow lanes to the bare rocky heights above, as scouts, to ascertain for their friends below if any land-sharks were appearing. It seems constructed for the special purpose of favouring the pursuit of smugglers from impertinent revenue-officers, and is probably the only capital in Europe which can boast,

from its tortuosity and narrowness, that a wheel-carriage never yet drove right through it; nor a hotel or male waiter intimated by their presence that stranger was not still a sacred title among its people, and gave the bearer of it a passport to the hospitality of every home. You need not, however, venture on the experiment. Lodgings for the traveller are found in plenty, and are inns simply under another name; where, while you may order what you please, you have the delightful feeling at the same time that your landlord has never troubled the licensing justices for any official permission to supply your wants. You drink from his own bottle, he is paid from your own purse, and the hospitable reciprocity is complete!

This bustle of landing and curiosity of looking has lulled us into forgetfulness of a fact which, after the perils of a voyage, few should be sorry to be reminded of. The peal of bells through the bright and breezless air reminds you that ever since steamers were known here, the morning of their arrival is the holy calm of the Sabbath; and if you have formed the notion that the natives of these bare and rocky isles, so far removed from the tracks of civilisation and travel, are an ignorant and barbarous people, a glance at the hundreds who are pouring up to their parish church, from the steep lanes of the town, and onwards from the dreary moors that spread themselves towards the interior, will at once dispel the idea. How well dressed they are! What lithe, vigorous forms have the men; what delicate features the sun-brown, blue-eyed daughters, and modest matrons that attend them! There is the pure Scandinavian type before you; not the high cheek-bones and the coarse or projecting mouth of the Celt, but the sharply chiseled, intelligent features of the children of the fair-haired Sea-kings; the shrines of active inquiring minds, and softened this morning by the influence of the hallowed day, or the 'haly,' as, in the brave old Norse dialect, they still constantly term it. You have been told they are a religious people, and as you join their worship, you feel they are so. Their singing of the opening psalm has something in it, to every stranger's ear, at once of the pathos that speaks of the loneliness of a mountain land, and the devotion that tells of a pious heart; when you mark the deep silence that breathes around as their minister carries up their feelings and aspirations on the wings of prayer, and are startled by the suppressed utterance of emotion, by which their simple natures are accustomed to express either their approval or their emotion at the words he speaks, you are not surprised to learn, that while the higher class of the Lerwighians are proverbially intelligent, hospitable, and virtuous, these peasants and fishermen, who form the staple of the congregation, are as brave and sober a people as her Majesty's dominions hold; and that a lapse from female purity, as mournfully characteristic of the one sex in the agricultural districts of Scotland, as insobriety is of the other, is in Shetland almost unknown. There is fortunately on this point a high conventional standard among the islanders; a feeling of ineffable degradation incurred by a fall from virtue, similar to that which Borrow describes as prevailing among the unmarried of the female gypsies. Do not, however, imagine the maidens of Shetland to be wholly exempt from the weaknesses of female humanity. They are great lovers of dress, and inordinate bibbers of tea; that single article in the islands bringing more revenue to Her Majesty's customs than their whole land-rental put together.

Forjacus, the learned Danish historian, in his book on the affairs of the Orcades, published in Latin, towards the close of the seventeenth century, relates a somewhat picturesque story of the manner in which the Christianity, of which the Shetlanders, on the whole, are such favourable specimens, was first

introduced among them. Olaf, king of Denmark, one of the heroic and dreaded sea-kings whom the Norse ballads have immortalised, having, in the year 995, encountered and taken prisoner Sigurd, Count of Hialtland, as the country was then called, offered him the alternative of baptism for himself, his son, and all his followers, or instant death, and the ravaging of his country with fire and sword. In vain the captive replied that he was ignorant of the tenets of Christianity, and had seen nothing in the lives of its adherents to make him deem it superior to other creeds; in vain he protested that never, either by force or promises, would he renounce the religion and the gods of his fathers; the king seized Guelph or Hund, his youthful son, by the hair, and brandishing his sword, crying: 'You shall see, count, that I spare none who turns away from the holy gospel,' was about to plunge it in his heart, when the father, melted by paternal tenderness, declared himself as satisfied of the truth of the new faith, as convinced of the vigour of its adherents; submitted to the initiatory baptismal rite, permitted it to be administered to his son, whose name was changed into Ludowig, and saw the warlike apostle depart to Orkney, radiant with satisfaction that Odin had lost, and the church gained, a province for ever.

So summary a process of conversion recalls that by which a proprietor in the Hebrides, in but recent times, reclaimed his tenantry from popery by driving them from altar to pulpit with a vigorously plied cane, until what they called the religion of the yellow stick had been well worked into their minds, and taken permanent root there. Nor was it less expeditious than that of the African chief who expressed his astonishment to Dr Livingstone that that zealous missionary should ever waste a second word upon his tribe so long as a cow-hide, to compel them to be converted, had any virtue in it. Sigurd's faith appears, however, to have been soon placed, by the arrival of pious priests, on the solid basis of conviction; and a succession of bishops—one of whom was St Magnus the martyr, who has left his name to their noblest and largest bay—kept alive the waning light that was thus kindled. Though St Magnus soon lost his head among his enemies, he left his cup to his friends; and that, says Buchanan, in whose time it was extant, was of a size to keep the feasts of the Lapithae in remembrance; while he adds, that, as if to secure the sanction of the saint for inebriety, every newly consecrated bishop was required to empty it at a draught; the people drawing an augury, if he did so, not only of a prosperous episcopate, but of bountiful fisheries and fruitful harvests. Cup and custom have now, whether happily or not, disappeared. The religion of the islands is maintained by ministers of the Established Church, and by numerous schools, planted by the heritors and by the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge, wherever there is a sufficient population to require them; the result being, that while those who remain in the islands give the magistrate and the policeman an almost perpetual holiday, the youth who leave them for the royal and mercantile navy and for civil life, rise, by dint of character and education, to good position, and reflect honest pride on all connected with them. Out of a population of thirty thousand, there is hardly an individual who cannot both read and write, or an adult who is not a member of a Christian church, or a reader of a weekly newspaper. At the period of the Great Revolution, which occurred in November, the event was not heard of till May in Shetland, and when reported at Lerwick by a fisherman, he was imprisoned, and nearly hanged for treason. Now, the latest intelligence is discussed with an avidity in every boat, which reminded us of a story of a late judge of the Court of Session when

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examining a Highland schoolmaster. ‘So,’ said his lordship, ‘you take in a newspaper and *Chambers's Journal* in your remote parish.’ ‘Yes,’ says the pedagogue, ‘for I tell them that the human mind is just like a toddy-kettle, ye maun be aye fillin at it.’

We question if there be a country in Europe where the eye of a stranger is more strikingly arrested than in a morning saunter from Lerwick. The road is studded for miles with groups of women, each with a straw-basket on her back, and each with knitting apparatus in her busy hands, chatting as she walks as busily as female tongues usually do, and ready to return, with modest frankness, the ‘*good-morning*’, they evidently look for. These are the working bees of the community. Many of these have left their homes in the town for the distant moss, hours before cities usually awake to life, to cut fresh peats with their long iron spades or *tuskers*, and fill their baskets with those they exposed to the sun the week before—peats being the only fuel that nineteen houses in the score in Shetland can command. Others of them are country maidens, as a glance at the contents of their *cassie*, or basket, tells. From one, the necks of inquiring fowls rear themselves; from another, droop the patient head of a calf. ‘How sell you the chickens, mistress?’ ‘The young ones’ (each sufficient for a meal) ‘are two shillings the dozen. This large cock you can have for fivepence; the calf for two shillings.’ ‘It seems very young,’ we remark. ‘Not so very young,’ is the arch rejoinder. ‘If it is spared till to-morrow, it will be two days old;’ and little probability, we believe, there is of its being spared. Boiled down in its tenderest infancy, and left to cool into a jelly, it forms one of their chief dainties. But how are the busy fingers occupied? The older women as they walk are knitting the soft woollen socks that are so prized, and of which there are a few pairs to dispose of in every cottage you enter. The younger, coarse as their dress and occupation seem, have threads on their wires which emulate in delicacy the spider’s web, and are working them into shawls and veils that, for elegance of pattern, and lightness of effect, appear like a web of morning gossamer woven by the fairies for Titania. That fair bevy, somewhat more highly dressed than the others, as being strangers in Lerwick, to which they are carrying their produce, have rowed this morning for miles through tides and currents, where both a strong and a skilful arm is required; and now that their hands have left the oar, they are forming shawls which will hardly weigh three ounces, and can knit stockings that have been found worthy of a king’s acceptance, being fine enough to be drawn through a marriage ring. Those more homely in attire are servants, who are engaged on somewhat peculiar terms—‘seven shillings in the half-year, and the use of their hands,’ a phrase which intimates that much of their labour lies in tending cattle and providing peats for the fire, and that the produce of what they knit, when thus occupied, is their own. They are generally adepts in the art. These stockings of royalty we have alluded to were worked by a lady’s hands; but her servant, not knowing their destination, and seeing only they were finer than usual, resolved that they should grace her own feet at a country merry-making, and discovered in the morning that she had danced a hole in them. Nothing daunted, either by the intricacy of the pattern or the gossamer fineness of the thread, she at once, with the almost instinct for knitting that distinguishes the Shetland girls, set herself to repair the rent, and with such skill, that it never could have been discovered but for her own vanity. His majesty, in acknowledging the gift, intimated that he had worn them at Holyrood; and the girl, when informed of the circumstance by her gratified mistress, electrified her by the exclamation, ‘I hope, if he has torn them as I did, he’ll get them

as well mended!’ It is seldom, however, their work is of so delicate or so costly a description. If they receive ninepence a pair for their socks, and five-and-twenty or thirty shillings for their finest shawl, they are well satisfied as being thereby enabled to make an appearance in church on Sunday, which fills their simple bosoms with honest pride, and turns admiring lovers into happy husbands.

It certainly jars on the feelings, and proclaims a somewhat too primitive state of manners, that on the female population should, in addition to their proper and congenial duties, devolve the hardest labours of the field. To see them rowing their boats, talking and laughing the while, is picturesque; but not to find a row of them, under a hot sun, driving their sharp narrow spades into the stony soil, and flinging the upturned contents from them with an energy that bathes their embrowned foreheads in perspiration. The men aid them in the spring labour; but, even when it is most pressing, with a descending air. Their own proper field of duty is the sea—the bounteous mother and dearest friend of the Shetlanders. Running up everywhere in creeks and sounds to the very centre almost of the mainland; embracing in its white arms every rocky and green island that dots its surface, and bringing to their very doors exhaustless shoals of every species of fish that its waters hold, from the sillock and the herring to the seal and whale, old Mother Thetis seems to have a positive fondness for her green-eyed children; while they, from placing their dwellings—whether the cottage of the peasant, the house of the pastor, or the castle of the proprietor—where the sight and sound of her waters are never absent, seem to reciprocate her affection. Nothing proves so wearisome to a Shetlander, when he first visits southern climes, as the presence of trees everywhere, and the absence of the familiar sea. Compared to its ever-changing aspect, the richest landscape is tame to him, and he ever wishes to die with its murmurs in his ear, and its cool air upon his brow. During the winter months, from November to February, when the dull daylight is of only five or six hours’ duration, the sea clothes itself with a terror indeed that frowns the boldest away; breaking over precipices twenty feet above its usual height, invading dwellings that seem perched on their summits rather like watch-towers than habitations, and throwing masses of rock on the shore that the hands of the Titans could not have hurled. But in February it softens its mood. The fishing from the rock with string and crooked pins, by the women and boys, that has been sufficient to supply them with the young of the coal-fish as a relish to their barley-bread, gives way to the more serious occupation of ling-fishing. May sends them to the distant banks where the cod abounds, in sloops with from eight to ten men on board, and fifty lines in operation, which are often weighted with fish faster than the hands can disengage them. August invites them to secure the herrings that drift past them in shoals innumerable, and calls them, scarcely less regularly, to the stirring excitements of the whale-chase. Yonder, ten miles off at sea, is a noble herd, spouting and shewing their huge backs in their gambols after the herring shoal, as conscious of strength and joy. ‘The tide is flowing. Magnus! Eric! we may have them! Out with the boats; warn the absent men. If this breeze lasts, we may weather them ere they get to the roost. Up sail, boys, and let go!’

The village in the meantime is assembled, young and old, on the cliffs, watching with eager gaze the gallant little boat as it scuds with its great square sail before the breeze. It tacks at last. They have turned the herd; and yonder are the boats of the Barra men, who have joined them, and are keeping

the monsters towards the shore. Stupid creatures! Well do they merit their name of the Ca'ing or Driving whales. A herd of Cambridgeshire heifers are not more patiently driven forth from their lazy postures than they are from their depths to the shore. On they come; boats shooting from every headland, manned by men, women, and boys, appear as if summoned by magic behind them; while dissonant shouts and yells, which take away what little sense the poor brutes have remaining, ring with a demoniac exultation on every side. But, see, the great leader of the herd perceives danger. He has grazed the land, and is head to sea again. 'Try him with the harpoon! Old Andrew is at the helm! Now, Magnus, aim your best.' Hurrah! it holds. The monster feels the point, and with a horrible bellow is once more making for the shore. All is secure now; the rest follow their leader; and hemmed in, and driven on the shoal water, which is every moment receding, they splash, flounder, and moan in vain; while, armed with harpoons, spears, knives, hay-forks, peat-spades, and every available and imaginable kind of instrument, the excited multitude, up to the waist in water, from the small boy to the crippled tailor, hack and pierce the dark sides of the huge creatures till the bay is pool of blood. A glorious day's hunt! Eighty whales are its produce, from six to twenty feet in length, and averaging in value from two to three pounds apiece. One-third goes to the owner of the land, and the remainder to the captors; but on the principle, that all shall participate in the general joy; that while the men, to whom the capture is chiefly owing, shall have the larger share, not the smallest boy or feeblest old crone that has lifted weapon or even tongue against them, shall be wholly overlooked. This is a scene of frequent occurrence in the Shetlands; and there are few fields stretching to the sea that are not strewn with the bones of the ca'ing whale.

AUNT JANET'S DIAMONDS.

CHAPTER II.

FOUND!

'My aunt, Josiah, Mr Chapman, and Lucy were in the room; the officer had been sent down stairs. "The diamonds were in the safe after all," said my aunt to me the moment I entered. "The officer, on pulling the drawer right out, found them in the space behind the back of the drawer and the safe. He says, that as the drawer was crammed full, the case must have got hitched against the cover of the drawer, and when the drawer was pulled out, the case fell behind it, and so got pushed back by the drawer."

"I could see vindictive triumph in Josiah's eyes. "And now," said my aunt, "I have got to perform an act of justice towards Lucy. She has been wrongfully accused of stealing those diamonds. Under ordinary circumstances, I should have felt that no reparation which I could make would be too great; but she met the accusation with an infamous story—a story which, no doubt, she had originally trumped up for the purpose of gaining the good-will and assistance of a person who should have been above listening to such wicked insinuations."

"My aunt's words were positive torture in my ears.

"However," continued my aunt, "if Lucy will sign a paper, declaring that story utterly false, I will, on my part, buy her brother off from the army, give her a clear year's wages, and, as far as I dare in justice, not concealing what has occurred, give her such a character as may gain her a respectable place. Mr Chapman will draw out the statement."

"There was a dead silence while Mr Chapman was

writing; I raised my eyes to look at Lucy. The girl was evidently so entirely unhinged by what had occurred, that she seemed quite unconscious that the matter on hand concerned her.

"Now, Lucy," said Mr Chapman briskly, "sign this."

"Read it to her first," exclaimed my aunt.

"But it is not a lie, sir, indeed," said Lucy faintly, interrupting Mr Chapman as he read.

"Mr Chapman paid no attention to her, but read on to the end.

"Now," said he, "we won't argue the question of its being a lie or not; that would be an utter loss of time, for every person of common sense must be convinced that it is. If you sign this paper, you obtain the advantages your mistress has offered; if you refuse, you leave this house a beggar, without a character. Choose;" and he offered her a pen.

"Lucy!" I cried involuntarily.

The girl turned and looked at me with unmeaning gaze.

"Silence!" said my aunt to me in a severe tone; "don't you interfere with her."

'Mr Chapman was whispering to Lucy. From what I overheard, it was evident that he merely attributed her hesitation to an obstinate persistence in her story.

"But I could not keep silent. I had been forced to speak against Josiah upon strong conviction. I should never have felt convinced of my mistake if I thought that the girl had signed the paper from mercenary motives.

"Lucy," said I, "listen to me. The question is, was Mr Josiah with you in the garden that evening before the dinner, or not? They say it was your interest once to declare he was; it is now clearly your interest to deny it. Lay aside this wretched question of interest, and speak the truth. You will have to speak the truth one day. It is better to speak it now, though it makes you a beggar, than speak it hereafter with shame and remorse."

"I could see how agitated the girl was; pain of irresolution flushed her face: she abruptly left Mr Chapman, and came to my side.

"I won't sign it!" she exclaimed. "I did speak the truth."

"My aunt was the first to recover from the surprise which my conduct created. She rang the bell; the butler entered. "Pay that girl," said she, "a month's wages, and turn her out of the house. Mind, she leaves this house not a thief, but a liar."

"My courage had ebbed away with the words I had addressed to Lucy; I sank into a chair overwhelmed with an intense feeling of moral exhaustion; then my aunt, in the bitterest words, upbraided me for the opinion I persisted in entertaining about Josiah. She would insist upon it, notwithstanding all my assurances, that I had eagerly caught at the girl's story, in the hopes of undermining Josiah's character; but the scheme had failed—the blow had fallen on my head. She called upon Mr Chapman to witness her words: "Not one penny of her fortune should be mine; henceforth, I should work for my bread as a governess, and cease to be an inmate of her house." Suddenly recollecting herself, she drew Mr Huntly's letter from her pocket. "There," said she, "the sooner you answer that, the better. Now! this evening! go, and say you are a beggar, and see if he will care for you."

"I was very angry—indignant at her cruel challenge. I spoke at random. "I will go," said I, and I left the room. I was far too excited to think. I put on my bonnet, hurried down stairs, and shut the hall-door after me. Whither?—to Mrs Huntly's—but?—I began to think as I turned on the door-step, and looked forth on the common: the old home-scene, so familiar, years and years I had looked out upon it

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from my bedroom window. The sun was beginning to set as I lingered on the door-step; the whole scene was bright and warm, but it chilled me through and through. The feeling of home was gone—I felt I was face to face with the cold hard world. Then doubt and desolation came upon me. If my aunt had been alone, I would have returned, and swallowed my words, and prayed on my knees to be taken back; but I thought of Josiah's triumph—I dare not face that; and I turned away, and left the house.

'I shall never forget the cruel doubts which beset me in that short walk to Mrs Huntly's, the sad possibilities which thronged my brain; not that I doubted of his love, but I knew he was not rich; he might have looked for something on my part to enable us to marry. At the very least, I was throwing myself on his generosity, not only accepting, but seizing eagerly at his offer, as a drowning wretch clutches at a straw. Then my circumstances were so totally changed since the offer was made, that my pride revolted at the idea of forcing him, out of honour, to take me as his wife. The idea of going to Mrs Huntly's, which, on the spur of the moment, had appeared perfectly natural and proper, began to seem nothing short of utter boldness and impudence.

'I am sure I must have given it up, and gone back humbly to my aunt's, had he—Mr Huntly—not overtaken me on the common; he only bowed, and would have passed on (he said afterwards he thought he had no right to address me till his letter was answered). I spoke his name only very low, but he caught it, and turned. I felt terribly frightened, and could scarcely speak, but this was only at first; a few words from him, and doubt was over, and he took me home to his mother.

'Mrs Huntly was very kind to me; she called me from the very first her daughter, listening with a mother's sympathy to all I had to say. I was to call their house my home; and in a very short time it really was my own home. We were married as speedily as arrangements would permit.

'I did all in my power to obtain my aunt's forgiveness, but in vain. The day after I was at Mrs Huntly's, my wardrobe, and everything I possessed, were sent to me, but no letter or message; and though I wrote very often, I received no reply. This was the only drawback to my happiness. Though Mr Huntly's income was small, it was quite sufficient for every comfort. He was so thoughtfully kind: he bought Lucy's brother out of the army; and Lucy, poor girl, Mrs Huntly took at once into her service, and she never left us till she went away to be married many years afterwards.

'I had been married three months, and I had never even chanced to meet my aunt in my walks, but I heard of her from time to time from mutual friends.

'One day, intelligence was brought me that she was seriously ill—a paralytic seizure. In the greatest anxiety, I hastened to the house; the doctor's carriage was at the door. I asked how my aunt was. The butler said she was very ill. Could I see her? The man said he had strict orders to refuse me admittance. "Whose orders?" I inquired.

"Mr Josiah's," was the reply. I was reflecting upon what I had better do, when the doctor came down stairs. He had always been a very kind friend of mine.

"I'm so glad you are here," said he; "I think it might do your aunt good; she has mentioned your name several times." He begged to have a few words with me in the dining-room.

"But I'm refused admittance."

"Mr Josiah's orders, sir," said the butler, puzzled what to do.

"I'll be responsible," replied the doctor, and I followed him into the dining-room.

'The doctor did not disguise from me that it was a most serious attack. It was agreed that I should enter my aunt's room as if nothing had occurred between us, and busy myself with the general arrangements.

'My aunt's face did brighten up when I approached her, and she smiled faintly. I was very distressed to see her in so sad a condition. I was on the point of referring to the past, and begging her forgiveness, but the doctor drew me back, and motioned to me to be silent.

'My presence and attentions seemed to cause my aunt so much satisfaction; that the doctor expressed a strong wish, if possible, that I should remain and nurse her. I could sleep on the sofa in the room. He feared that my services would not be very long required. I was so very glad to be of any comfort to my aunt, that I readily agreed to the proposition; then I recollect about Josiah, and reminded the doctor of the peculiar circumstances in which I was placed. He promised me that I should have no annoyance or anxiety on that score. I was thus fully established as chief nurse. My first meeting with Josiah was not nearly as embarrassing as I had feared; he was certainly cold and distant in his manner, but he expressed himself very pleased that my aunt should have me with her; nevertheless, I heard afterwards, that the unfortunate butler who had admitted me was peremptorily dismissed.

'At the first, when my aunt was so ill and helpless, Josiah came very little into the sick-room; but as soon as she grew better, and began thoroughly to regain her consciousness and the use of her limbs, he was in and out of the room all day. On the plea that I should be over-fatigued, he wanted me to let the nurse sleep in the room. I would not consent to this; I said, that as my aunt was so accustomed to my nursing, I knew she would never like anybody else with her. He was very reluctant to forego his proposal. The nurse slept in the boudoir, and I observed that she became far more active and attentive in the night than she had been during the worst of the illness. If I got up ever so softly to go to my aunt's bed, she was sure to be in the room; and more than that, the slightest movement always brought Josiah tapping at the door to know if we wanted anything.

'My aunt was so pleased with Josiah's attentions, she would call out as loud as she could: "Thank you, Josiah; you go to bed; it's nothing, Josiah."

'I remember wanting to send a note home; there was no ink in my aunt's inkstand, so I asked the nurse to get some. She left the room, and Josiah presently came in with his own inkstand, and placed it before me. I wrote my note, which he undertook to send, and then he carried his inkstand off with him.

'Somehow, I could never get any ink kept in my aunt's inkstand, and whenever I inquired for ink, Josiah was sure to come into the room.

'I soon discovered that every movement of mine was closely watched; but it was all done so cleverly and naturally, that I had not a word to say.

'One morning, Josiah was sitting in the room with my aunt and myself; I had been up several times in the night, and was in a sort of half-doze, when I heard my aunt address Josiah in a low tone: "She has been very good to me during my illness, giving up her time so entirely. You feel that, Josiah, don't you?"

"Yes, aunt."

"Then, Josiah, forgive her, for my sake."

"For your sake, aunt, I do forgive her."

"You hear that?" said my aunt to me—"Josiah forgives you."

"From the bottom of your heart—say so, Josiah."

"From the bottom of my heart," echoed Josiah; but I could see the scowl on his face as he spoke.

"I must do something for her," continued my aunt.

"Oh, aunt," exclaimed Josiah, starting from his seat and coming to the bedside, "haven't I been always affectionate, and attentive, and dutiful? Did I marry against your commands? Did I spurn your kindness?"

"You have been very good, Josiah—very good," replied my aunt. "I only want to do some little thing for her, because she has been so attentive during this illness."

"My pride was aroused, and but for fear of over-exciting my aunt, I should have declined any return for doing what was merely my duty.

"I can't give her any money; I've sworn not," said my aunt, addressing Josiah.

"You did swear it," he replied very deliberately; "Mr Chapman was witness."

"But there are the diamonds, Josiah."

"The diamonds!" he exclaimed, raising his voice.

"I could give the diamonds, Josiah."

"What! your own diamonds, aunt," said he, "which you have always worn?"

"They're not money, Josiah."

"But she married out of the family. Your diamonds go to strangers?"

"I could not endure this. I begged my aunt to let Josiah have the diamonds.

"She shall have the diamonds!" said my aunt peremptorily. "Go and get them, Josiah;" and with some difficulty, she took off her neck the key of the drawer.

Josiah, much to his discontent, was forced to obey; he went to the boudoir, and brought in the diamonds, which he placed on the bed.

"I was so dreadfully afraid of some scene taking place, which I knew would be very prejudicial to my aunt, that I was greatly relieved at the doctor being announced.

"There," said my aunt, pushing the case towards me with great effort, "I said they should be yours the first day I bought them, if you were a good girl: you have been very good during this illness; take them; and do what you like with them."

"One word," said Josiah, speaking to me: "never forget that those were once Aunt Janet's diamonds, which she bought years ago. They are very precious to me. If you ever desire to part with them, or even to modernise the setting, let me know. I will strive to scrape money together to give the full worth as they stand now."

"Poor Aunt Janet! she little knew what she was doing when she gave me those diamonds.

The doctor was quite right; my services were not required very long: another seizure took place; and after lingering a few days, my aunt died. The whole of the property was left to Josiah, with the reservation that, if he died without children, the land was to go to my eldest son.

"Of course, we kept up no intercourse with Josiah; but I heard quite enough of his goings-on to shew that I had formed a true estimate of his character. As soon as he came into his wealth, he began to lead a very wild and dissipated life.

"When I placed the diamonds in my husband's hands, I told him that Aunt Janet had given me the option of parting with them, which, if he thought advisable, I should be very happy to do, as I felt our circumstances would not permit of my wearing them. He would not listen to my proposal: he was not pressed for money, he said, and in a few years, I might be fully entitled to wear them.

"Ah, my love, I am so glad that you are not going to marry a man on that horrid Stock Exchange! I am sure the dreadful anxiety I have undergone about Mr Huntly. In those days, he was without the

experience which he now possesses, and at a time when steady business was very dull, he took to speculating on his own account, and on behalf of others who were very cunning and plausible. It seemed that he was successful at first, and I used to be quite surprised at his elation of spirits. One day he came home sadly downcast; he had had very heavy losses, chiefly through the villainy of a client, whose debts my husband was bound to make good. He feared it would be necessary for me to part with the diamonds. Of course, I was only too glad to think that we yet possessed the means of setting things to rights.

"According to my promise, I resolved at once to write to Josiah, and offer him the diamonds; and we agreed that I had better ascertain their value from an experienced jeweller, and so mention a sum in the letter.

"Taking Lucy as an escort, I went off the next morning to a very old-established jeweller's at the top of the Strand, where Mr Huntly's family had dealt for many years.

"I gave the case into the hands of the chief partner of the firm, who happened to be in the shop, and asked him to give me some idea of the market-value of the stones.

"He made a very careful examination.

"I suppose, ma'am," said he, "you are aware that these are not diamonds?"

"I said, with great warmth, that they had belonged to an aunt of mine, that they were bought at —'s.

"Excuse me, ma'am," he replied; "they could not have been sold for diamonds; but they are very perfect imitations: at first, I was deceived by them myself."

"Why?" I replied, in a state of the greatest excitement, "I was present, years ago, when they were bought—I know they are diamonds!"

"You have asked my opinion," said the jeweller kindly, "and I am very sorry to be obliged to undeceive you. The proof is very simple: I shall, if you will allow me, draw a file over one of these stones; if the stone remains uninjured, it is a diamond."

"Do it!" said I with desperation; but, as I spoke, I felt the man was right. We were ruined—my husband compromised!

"Crash went the file—the stone was starred! I looked for a moment, and fainted.

"When I came to myself, Lucy was attending to me.

"Mr Josiah!" she whispered in my ear.

"What?" said I, dreadfully confused.

"He took them that night; I know he did."

The shop-people were about us; I bade her be silent. We regained our coach, and returned home. I felt convinced that Josiah had changed the diamonds. Ah me, it was very weary and sad waiting as that day dragged slowly on, and Mr Huntly was so late. When he did come home, he was far calmer than I had expected.

"Thank God," said he, "I know the worst of it—a thousand pounds will set things straight. You told me your aunt gave more than twelve hundred for the diamonds"—

"But—" said I, in a perfect agony.

"But what?" he exclaimed impatiently.

"Oh, Edward," I replied, "the sooner I tell you the better. They are not diamonds: they are worth nothing!"

I recounted the events of the morning.

"I shall never forget the end of that day; its utter hopelessness and despair; ay, and the bitter days that followed close upon it. How to raise that thousand pounds? Why, selling all we possessed, at the price things fetch at a sale, we knew would not realise one-half; and then my husband would stand compromised for the rest, a defaulter, with his name posted

up. I remember it was all so sad, that I felt I was almost doing wrong to smile at baby as he laughed and crowded in my arms.

'In the absence of direct proof, my husband thought it was hopeless to do anything with regard to Josiah; but I was determined to have Mr Chapman's advice in the matter. That gentleman received me very kindly. I found that Josiah had given him serious offence with regard to some pecuniary transaction arising out of my aunt's will. He was greatly astonished when I told him that the diamonds were false. He confessed that, on after-reflection, he had been very much puzzled by Lucy's persistence in her statement; but if he had entertained any suspicions against Josiah, it was of course nothing beyond the supposition, that Josiah, having asked the girl to meet him, and fearing the affair had been discovered, had endeavoured to shift out of it as best he might. The false diamonds gave a totally new colour to the transaction. The case would stand thus—Josiah might have fallen into extravagances before my aunt's death; indeed he, Mr Chapman, had received pretty strong proof that such was the fact. Unwilling to confess his delinquencies, he had sought some other mode of extrication. Marriage with me would have given him the immediate command of money. That failed. Then the abstraction of the diamonds. He knew that my aunt would wear the diamonds on the night of the dinner-party; Lucy is asked to meet him at the end of the garden on that night; he takes care that she has the keys of the press left for a time in her hands; the diamonds are missing; suspicion naturally falls on Lucy. Ten days have elapsed between the party and the loss of the diamonds being discovered; the diamonds are altered during that period; and at the very last moment, the false stones are cleverly deposited in a place in which nineteen people out of twenty would never dream of looking for them. But all this supposition, urged Mr Chapman, is worth nothing, unless we can get hold of Josiah's accomplice in the affair.

'Mr Chapman very warmly pledged himself to assist me, though he could not hold out any strong hopes of success.

"In the first place," said he, "we must ascertain whether your aunt ever purchased diamonds or not."

We found, on application, that the jeweller's books shewed that certain diamond ornaments had been sold to my aunt at the price of £1370. Moreover, the late foreman, an old man, who had since become a partner, was prepared to swear to their being diamonds.

In order to ascertain Josiah's cognizance of the fraud, Mr Chapman directed me to write to my cousin; and he sketched out a letter which stated that my circumstances obliged me to part with the diamonds; and according to my promise, I gave him the first offer at the price my aunt had originally paid.

To my surprise, Josiah sent an answer almost by return of post. The letter was written in his usual hypocritical style: he deplored the necessity of my parting with the diamonds, but he was truly obliged to me for not forgetting his request. He believed that diamonds had lately risen in value; and he thought the fairest plan would be that the diamonds should be taken to his jeweller's, and he would direct them to give me the highest market-price, my own jeweller had of course better be consulted.

"He knows all about it," said Mr Chapman, reading the letter, "or he would not have made such a proposal."

"But," said I impatiently, "how will this avail us? The auctioneer is now in our house."

"Have faith, madam," he replied; "I am acting under the advice of a very clever detective."

'He then directed me to write again to Josiah, and say that I had been advised that the most satisfactory mode of disposing of the diamonds would be by public competition.

'Josiah did not communicate with me again, but he wrote to the auctioneer, commissioning him to bid any fair sum at the sale.

'I confess I had given up all hopes of success; but on the very evening of the day on which the sale took place, while we were anxiously waiting for the auctioneer's account of the proceeds, in came Mr Chapman, exhibiting as much glee as his dry legal face would permit.

"Josiah's bought the diamonds!" he exclaimed.

"What! the paste?"

"No. Josiah's not such a fool as to give ten thousand pounds for paste."

'We believed that Mr Chapman must have been suddenly bereft of his senses; but he proved his words by a cheque on his own banker's for eight thousand pounds; and further than that, he placed in my hands a little box containing Aunt Janet's veritable diamonds.

'This was Mr Chapman's story. It had been arranged that the false diamonds should be on view with the rest of the effects; but they were to be placed under a glass case, and the detective, as an auctioneer's man in charge, was to watch narrowly all the people who came to view them. It was also agreed, on any person desiring a closer inspection, that the detective was to make excuses about the key of the case having been mislaid. Several people, evidently dealers in jewellery, had grumbled a great deal at only being able to see the diamonds through the glass, but nobody had expressed a doubt as to their being real. At last, two men came in together, and while the one was complaining about the key, the other, at a glance, told his companion that it did not matter; he knew they were only paste.

"How could that man be certain at a glance that the stones were paste?"

'The detective motioned to Mr Chapman, who was standing near. Mr Chapman went up to the man, and drawing him aside, told him that he was quite right; the diamonds were only paste, and it would be worth money to any person who could say how they came to be paste.

'By dint of clever examination, and promises of reward, the man confessed that he had made those very imitation stones himself! When?—Somewhere about two years before. For whom?—Well, he didn't mind saying that—the fellow was lately dead—Benson, a Jew money-lender, who often employed him for that sort of job. On whose behalf was Benson acting?—Ah! Benson kept his affairs very close; but it did happen there was a great press at the end to get this work done; and when he took it home to Benson's, he hurried at once into the private office, and there was the gentleman, all impatient to get possession of the false stones. Benson was angry with him for coming into the office. He never found out the gentleman's name; but he was certain he should know him again. And the diamonds?—Yes, he fancied he knew where the diamonds were; the set had not been broken up; they were in the hands of a man who wanted a long price—diamonds were rising in the market; the man could bide his time.

"Now," said Mr Chapman, "that gentleman you chanced to see is very anxious to get those diamonds back again; he will give the man his own price for them if they are brought to my office to-morrow morning, and something handsome to you in the bargain."

'The man agreed. Mr Chapman wrote to Josiah, making an appointment for the following morning, at eleven o'clock, respecting some executor business.

"The man duly arrived at the office with the diamonds, and Mr Chapman had them inspected by an experienced jeweller, who declared that they were genuine, and that they exactly corresponded with the original setting.

"Josiah kept the appointment.

"I can almost see Mr Chapman before me now as he described his interview with Josiah. His features never lost their sedate business aspect, but his small gray eyes twinkled with waggish exultation.

"Josiah was very ill-tempered, rude, about some proposal of Mr Chapman's respecting my aunt's affairs.

"You are an ungrateful fellow, Josiah," said Mr Chapman; "I'm always doing what I can for you. I heard that you were very anxious to get hold of your aunt's diamonds."

"Yes," replied Josiah; "I told the auctioneer to bid for me; but he says those diamonds have turned out to be sham."

"That's just it, Josiah; I have given myself all the pains in the world to get the real ones for you."

"Fiddlesticks!"

"Fact. They were in the hands of a Mr Benson. (Josiah turned deadly pale.) I find that person is dead; but I've a young man in the next office who was employed by Mr Benson; he says he once saw a gentleman in Mr Benson's office"—

"I am very much indebted to you for your trouble," exclaimed Josiah, with the deepest of scowls on his countenance; "I'm only too glad to get my poor aunt's diamonds. What am I to pay?"

"Ten thousand pounds!" replied Mr Chapman very deliberately. (Josiah made use of very strong expressions.) Perhaps you don't think they are genuine," said Mr Chapman. "Shall we have the young man in?"

"I'll give the money," said Josiah hastily.

"Write a cheque."

"I have not so much money at my banker's."

"You forget," said Mr Chapman, "that the money for that estate is lodged at your banker's, pending the completion of the purchase: it will just suffice."

"Josiah wrote the cheque. "Curse you," he exclaimed, as he gave it to Mr Chapman.

"You ought to say thank you, Josiah. I'm sure I've taken a deal of trouble for you, acting as a friend. Now, if I had acted as a lawyer"—

"Give me the diamonds," said Josiah.

Mr Chapman placed the box in Josiah's hand. Josiah was about to leave the room. "You will excuse me," said Mr Chapman blandly, "for making the remark; but your late aunt gave her diamonds—not the paste-stones—to your cousin. It is of course for you to consider what claim your cousin has to those diamonds."

Josiah considered for a moment, placed the box on the table, and skulked out of the room.

DROUGHT AND ITS LESSONS.

In writing of the floods in the early part of 1859, it was easy to be cheerful and philosophical, because the evil was over for the time, the losses had been accepted as irremediable, and the picturesque aspect began to appear, under which we come to regard past trials. It is otherwise at this moment in treating of drought. I am sitting in the midst of the devastation caused by it; and all around me are feeling the heaviness of a life which is largely occupied in struggles to provide from day to day so essential an article as water. If we do not derive some good lessons from such an experience as we are undergoing during this summer of 1859, we must be thoroughly unteachable, and pain

and anxiety will be the unmixed evils which they never need be.

In many parts of the kingdom, the drought of this year is more severe than any on record; but elderly people remember things which should have taught our fathers to prepare us better for the present visitation. The summer of 1820 is associated in the minds of those who remember it at all with the excitement of Queen Caroline's trial. The heat struck down dead several labourers in the fields, and many horses on the roads; and the night seemed to be turned into day. In London, the Parks were thronged to the last minute allowed, and the streets were full all night; and so it was in the country towns, where the neighbours lent one another newspapers, and went about gossiping over the great trial throughout the cool hours. Not the less, however, did multitudes all day line the roads by which news was to travel; and all who had horses rode out to meet the mails, and gallop home with the news. It was too hot for sleep or rest: the gardens yielded no pleasure, for they were as brown as thatch, or as white as the roads; and there was discomfort in almost every household, from the scarcity of the first necessary of life. In the grazing districts, the grass was dry before it was mown, and sapless as saw-dust. The cattle were restless in the meadows, their tongues hanging out, and their tails whisking incessantly among the swarms of flies which never paused for a moment in their persecution. It was a piteous sight to see cows and horses perpetually returning to the hollows or ditches where they were accustomed to find ponds and brooks, but where now there was only mud or dust. The hot summer passed away; and it does not appear that anybody learned anything by it.

The summer of 1826 was worse—at least in the midland counties. There the work-people sat up all night to watch the springs. They were even more tired than usual with their day's work; but they could not sleep, and must take the only chance of getting water. Their fretful children would not lie still; they were themselves too feverish to sleep; and groups of neighbours, therefore, took their pitchers and their infants and sat, in hope deferred, beside the springs till the sun was up again. The most welcome present that the citizens of any rank could send to each other was a pitcher of fresh, cool water; and it was offered and accepted as a bottle of Tokay would be in ordinary times. In Lord Dudley's beautiful park at Himley, the lake, ponds, and streams were so entirely dried up that the deer could not be preserved. They were drooping and dying, when Lord Dudley, whose brain was giving way under the disease which soon became hopeless insanity, resolved to turn the incident to account, to gratify his crazy avarice. He ordered the deer to be killed, and cut up and sold as venison. The whole country round was unsuspecting and delighted. Ordinary folk could now send a haunch of venison to their friends; and all who contemplated giving a dinner at any future time would give it now, since they could set their guests down to venison. The case turned out even worse than the venison-supper in backwoods' travelling, which 'keep the word of promise to the ear, and break it to the hope.' In America, the venison is unmanageably tough; in Worcestershire, it was flabby. It was worse. Suffice it that the sellers presently asked twopence per pound for it, and immediately after could not get a farthing. Throughout the higher *terrain* of the midland counties the wells stood idle and empty, their buckets cracked, and the ropes dangling. Brewers' stocks were rapidly exhausted. Food would not keep. Dogs were suspected. When the memorable thunder-storms of August burst over the land, the most panic-stricken enjoyed hearing the rain come down.

That was a long time ago; and now, after thirty-



three years, we find ourselves no better prepared to encounter a drought than we were then. Yet we might have been. Other people are. There are whole provinces in continental countries where the people and their fields are as nearly independent of the season in regard to water-supply as we should be of inundation, if we had carried agricultural and arterial drainage to their highest perfection throughout the kingdom. What they have done, we might do. What might our condition have been, then, and what is it, in this summer of 1859? It will be happy for us, and more than we deserve, if the question is not even more serious in the autumn than it is now.

Scientific men give us, with one accord, the following account of how we are supplied with water. Taking the average of the surface of England, 1300 tons of water per acre is the amount of rain-fall. Of this quantity, about ninety tons reach the subsoil, and replenish the underground reservoirs from which the springs are derived. The rest goes away in evaporation, and vegetation, and drainage. From April to October, very little water sinks down to the reservoirs, as vegetation uses up more, and evaporation goes on at its most rapid rate. The smallest evaporation takes place in the four months which follow October; and they are usually our most rainy months; so that our main reliance for plenty of water is on a rainy November, December, January, and February. More than 83 per cent. of the replenishment of the springs is ordinarily supplied during that third-part of the year. If November and December are duly wet, we may be easy about the water-supply of the next year, except in the places which have few or no springs, and depend on the immediate rain-fall. If rain falls in January, too, all is safe. It is not asserted that people feel thus easy or uneasy, or look into the grounds of expectation for the next year. Most of us would as soon think of consulting a fortuneteller as to the weather at next haymaking or harvest. Few of us know enough about the matter to occupy ourselves with it so long beforehand; it would be well if we did; for it is inconceivable that we should not attempt to store up a water-supply, if we were rationally convinced that the spontaneous one would fail short.

Meantime, those who do understand the case have been for some time warning us that the rain-fall during the non-evaporating months has been deficient ever since 1852. The farmers have not needed to be told that the springs have, during that time, been shrinking, year by year. It appears that for six years before the potato-rot, the winter rain-fall had considerably exceeded the average, that it was very irregular for the next six, being for two of the six rather below, and for the other four considerably above, the average. Then came the very wet winter of 1852-53, when nearly eleven inches of rain fell, instead of six and one-third inches. Every one of the six years since that date has been far below the average; and the last winter the lowest of all, being scarcely more than half the average. In fact, the rain-fall of the last two winters has barely exceeded the average supply of one. This may appear strange in connection with our recent complaints of floods; but a little consideration will shew how the two facts may be reconciled. After an actively evaporating month of October, we had a very dry November. We have not forgotten the bitter winds, and the early, intense, and protracted frost which surprised and troubled us. December was dry till near its close; and the rains of January were very partial. We must remember, too, that inundations are caused more frequently by the sudden rush than by the total quantity of water.

Long before the rainy months arrived, the farmers in the eastern counties were last autumn paying for

water for their cattle. In February, the springs were not flowing as they ought to be; and they did not give forth fuller streams as spring advanced. On the contrary, they did not answer to the draught from them; and in May, when they usually reach their greatest height, all were low, and many were actually dry. Meantime, April had been dry, and very unfavourable to vegetation. The beginning of the month was like the middle of May; and then came a sudden frost—more disastrous than that of November; and snow fell thick, and drifted among the hills of the northern counties and of Scotland. Since that snow, no serviceable rain has fallen throughout large portions of England, Scotland, and Ireland. The inequality of weather has been remarkable. We have heard of floods here and there; and the thunderstorms, attended by heavy rain, have been numerous and severe in many places, including London. But while the water stood a foot deep in London streets, and filled cellars, and covered wharfs along the Thames, the inhabitants of the south-eastern counties were seeing all things turning to dust before their eyes. Lawns and grass-plots were mere cakes of brown fibres; gardens went to ruin altogether; and the cows and carriage-horses of the gentry were kept alive by water which paid ninepence toll, twice a day, in its course from the distant river. Matters were worse in June in those counties than they were in September of last year. What, then, is the prospect for the coming autumn, it being absolutely known that the springs were never filled?

We hear most about the eastern counties, because the inquiries made have been illustrated chiefly by their condition; but the phenomena of drought have been even more conspicuously manifested in other regions. In Scotland, we heard from many parts that there was no hay; that everything was burned up; and that the young grouse were perishing of thirst. From Ireland, we had news of a fine potato-crop, but of little else, till some genial rains fell at midsummer. In another week or two, the supply of water in Dublin became insufficient for household and industrial purposes; and all luxurious use of it was stopped by the authorities—the citizens being choked with dust from the discontinuance of the practice of watering the streets. While writing, we read that, except in a part of Galway, all Ireland is parched with drought, so that the spring crops in many parts are not enough to employ the sickle, and all hope of green crops is so completely over, that the farmers are sowing rape in their 'vacant fields.'

While the French emperor was buying up our stocks of hay, the prospect of an average supply became daily more hopeless; and it is certain that owners of cattle and horses will be heavily taxed as the winter comes on for our general ignorance of the right method of guarding ourselves against an insufficient water-supply.

The smaller details which come under one's personal observation give, however, a more accurate and lively impression of the seriousness of such a calamity as that of the present season; and I will, therefore, describe the state of things in the district in which I live.

In April, it became clear throughout the great fruit-counties, that the year must be a disastrous one to the owners of cherry, and all plum and pear, orchards. A cherry-crop worth £200 in ordinary seasons was destroyed by frost in one night; and this was only a specimen of what was happening throughout half the kingdom. In our northern county, Westmoreland, this disappointment about fruit was the first of a dreary series. So little rain followed the frost, that the sowing of root-crops was difficult, from the caked and unprepared character of the soil. No rain followed to encourage the seed to sprout. Shoots appeared at

intervals, leaving long bare spaces. How anything came up, was the wonder; for all that was previously growing stopped. After the 26th of April, no rain fell. The grass, shut up for hay, could not overtop the butter-cups. The gardens could not be watered, for the wells were getting dry, one after another, and the streams were becoming a mere chain of stagnant pools, warm and disagreeable for household purposes.

Such pump-water as could be had was muddy, or had fresh-water shrimps wriggling in it. Owners of carts began fixing a barrel in the vehicle, and selling water from the lake at sixpence the barrel. Owners of cattle spent freely, to water their stock; and private families collected water patiently for many days, to meet the needs of washing-day. Children who had pet flowers, and boys or men who held prize plants, grew more anxious every day about keeping them alive. Every drop from the wash-basins—baths were by this time a too selfish luxury—and from the wash-tub was given to the most necessary vegetables, with daily diminishing hope of keeping anything alive. The character of travelling in the lake district was quite altered. A new and dreary silence prevailed in valleys always hitherto resounding with the voice of many waters. Scale Force, and Lodore contained each a mere runnel of water; and Ara Force was actually abolished. Throughout its entire ravine, all was dry, silent, and desolate. The tarns on the uplands were basins of caked earth, or of slime; and instead of floating blossoms of water-lilies, there were only their dirty, contorted, shrunken roots sticking up in the slime. The mountain slopes grew yellower every day, and the fields in the levels browner. The great oaks and other deep-rooted forest-trees began to droop and shew the wrong side of their foliage, like shrubs that have stood in a strong wind for a whole day. It became a matter of grave daily toil to provide water for ducks and fowls; and the restless cows were perpetually going to their usual watering-place, and turning away disappointed. Thus matters went on till the 20th of June, when a little rain fell in the night. On the 22d, 23d, and 26th, there were some heavy showers. We hoped our troubles were over now. What their pressure was, may be judged by the remark of a visitor, that it would frighten her to think of going through such an experience a second time; but that, as it was to happen, she was glad to have been in the midst of it, as it would be a thing to talk of to her latest day. When she said this, our trial was recommencing, and while I write, our condition is truly calamitous. After the 28th, there was no further relief. There had not been rain enough to fill the springs, nor even to penetrate the soil. At present, the soil is mere hot dust to any depth reached by the spade. Throughout whole valleys, where the farms form a chain from end to end, and the hills are usually peopled with grazing herds, the cattle are all sold off. The yards and sheds are empty, and the farmer has little diversion from gloomy thoughts—his stock being gone at much less than their value, and his crops dried to powder. The grass is still standing, sapless, and in the seed—bad hay, but left for the chance of St Swithin's mercies. The gentry are going away to places where there is water. Families are sending their linen to distant towns to be washed. The night does not bring rest, as usual. The servants are sent to bed at sunset, because they choose, with the generosity which they shew in seasons of trouble, to get up in the middle of the night, and collect water enough to carry us through the day. We look out every hour to windward, in lingering hope of seeing clouds coming; and by the time we are settling to sleep, the servants are rising, and stealing out in the dawn, with cans and garden-engine, to fish up, at its coolest, such water as may have collected since night

fell. But, other people pursuing the same plan, the neighbourhood is all alive, and collected at the brooks. All day long, everything is perishing. The young broods in the poultry-yards, which seemed to do well for the first month of their lives, pine and die off. There is no end of burying young turkeys, ducks, and chickens, even though they are kept supplied with enough to drink. The most striking object under the phase of drought is perhaps the mountains. They turn before one's eyes to red rocks, like those in the Arabian deserts. Hour by hour, the green covering shrinks, and the red spaces expand, till we hardly know our own hills. The lakes contract, and are deformed by broad new margins of mud, or of decaying vegetation. We are astonished at the severity of the experience, never having conceived the anxiety of watching in vain for weeks, during which the precious summer is slipping away, nor been aware of the number of points at which the nuisance would touch us in our daily lives. St Swithin has made no difference, except in deepening our disappointment; an indescribable apprehension creeps over us, an idea that '*it cannot rain;*' and the question haunts us, whether we have not shot an albatross. One pleasant relief comes from London—dozens of bottles of Malvern water, and blocks of American ice, packed in salt and saw-dust—sent by thoughtful friends. Such is now our situation, and while I describe it, the glass is high, the sun glares; there is not a cloud in the sky: and the news flies through the neighbourhood that there is not a drop of water up at the Great Hall, where such a phenomenon was never known before. Could anything have been done to avert all or any of this distress and loss? Yes; the evil might have been deferred and mitigated; though, perhaps, not, in such an exceptional season as this, altogether avoided.

What do people do in countries where drought is an annual incident, as in India and China, and as we might add, Lombardy and Piedmont? They store up the water when they can get it, and let it out, with art and nice economy, when it is wanted by the vegetation. It would require several columns to give an idea of what is done in India, where areas of many square miles are reclaimed from a desert state to one of the richest fertility by husbanding water in its season. The future prosperity of India depends more on irrigation than upon any one other art or process within human means. Scarcely less striking is the fertility secured throughout the great plains which stretch southwards from the spurs of the Alps. We have lately been reading a great deal about what the French army found there—the interminable verdure of the mulberry trees—'trees planted by rivers of water' for hundreds of miles, and always ready to yield large crops of juicy leaves, in the hottest weather, to the breeders of silk-worms. Were they so helpless in a drought as we are, the people of Lombardy and of Piedmont would soon be starved, in such a climate as theirs. The levels of all the great streams are therefore ascertained, and reservoirs are formed where they are wanted; and sluices are placed, and channels carried down, so that water can be administered to the soil with regularity and in abundance.

This irrigation is one of the gravest interests of society in those provinces beyond the Alps. The quarrels of neighbours, and the controversies between districts, relate more to water-supply than to any other topic. Lawsuits spring up along the course of rivers, and jealous and spiteful men can make themselves extremely well hated by turning a cock, or closing a sluice in an injurious way. Count Cavour has taken this to heart, both as a statesman and a country gentleman. We have recently heard a good deal about the occupation of his lands in the province of Vercelli by the Austrians, and have learned how extensively they are irrigated, for the growth of rice

and other products. As the proprietor of these lands, Count Cavour has used his influence in the province to get a 'water-parliament' established; that is, a council elected by proprietors of water-rights. By this council, the whole apparatus of irrigation is guarded, kept up, and improved; all operations are watched and reported on; and all complaints are heard and adjusted; so that, except when the Austrians are there, the territory produces in abundance all sorts of crops except jealousy and strife. Does not such an arrangement reproach us with ignorance, indolence, and wanton waste? Where is all the water gone which overflowed us so mischievously last winter? We let it run to waste; and what is our condition now for want of it?

For the common people of our country, however, perhaps the most impressive example is that of the German peasantry. Some ancestor of each peasant who has a patch of patrimony once did for that patch what the owner of to-day will do with every yard of ground he adds to it. The turf, or the soil, as far as the subsoil, is removed—cautiously shifted to one side; the level is carefully ascertained; and then, whichever way there is an incline, it is made regular and continuous, and as gradual as possible. This done, the soil is replaced—the incline being preserved—and little channels, a couple of inches wide, are made at regular distances, intersecting larger ones at right angles. Water is turned into these, as often as wanted, from the store at the top, whether it be the river or an artificial reservoir. If strangers, at first delighted to see the shining runnels in the grass or among the furrows, stand aghast at hearing at what a cost of labour the blessing is obtained, they are immediately consoled by finding that the expense is usually repaid by the crops of the first year, and in the most difficult cases, by those of the second. In grass-lands, four crops a year is the rule, both with the Germans and the Italians.

Now, how many of our landlords, tenants, or small proprietors have any accurate idea whatever of the levels and inclines on their lands, or have ever thought of gathering the rain-fall, and letting it out at pleasure in dry weather, over the length and breadth of their fields and meadows? No part of Mr Mechi's farm is ever drowned or parched; and Lord Hatherton has achieved a great fame by his water-meadows at Teddesley, near Penkridge, in Staffordshire. He has turned a worthless and unsightly waste into an Eden, by united drainage and irrigation. He tapped the swollen swamps and spongy bogs, and drew off the water into a great reservoir, whence it descends to the farm-buildings, for use and the drink of the stock, and as the moving-power of the machinery set up there: and thence it is led down, by methods resembling those of Lombardy and Germany, to fertilise above 100 acres of meadow-land, which produce twice as much hay as formerly, at the cost of 4s. 6d. per acre for laying the water off and on. Mr Bickford's method of irrigation has become increasingly known and acted upon for several years past; and we must hope that, under the great impulse which now carries agricultural science and art to a height never conceived of by our fathers, our countrymen will take in hand the great work of compensating for the irregularities of the seasons by the devices of human forethought. The losses in this single year by flood and drought must be as great as those of a year of war, probably much greater; and yet they might have been avoided. In a region where lakes lie in a chain or a group, divided by the levels of valleys, it is a shame that those levels should ever be parched by drought; and, indeed, wherever there is any inequality of surface, either superfluity or deficiency of water ought hereafter to be considered a disgrace. Under the sore suffering of the existing

drought, we cannot help thinking that this new mastery of the irregularities of seasons will date from 1859.

PROXIME ACCESSE RUNT.*

In the eyes of that gross world of which the poet justly complains, that it only credits what is done, and is cold to all that might have been, a miss is as good as a mile; not to have succeeded is all one with never having well endeavoured. With our Readers, on the contrary—that 'Other Public,' of so infinitely superior a character—we feel sure that no such sordid maxim holds; but rather this: 'Tis better to have tried and lost, than never to have tried at all; that is to say, if the attempt was commendable. Even in the cricket-field, when a man has done his best, surprised, back-handed, overreached, to catch the unexpected ball, and fails, the charitable spectators are ready to exclaim 'Well-tried,' and only the malicious and mean-minded sneer forth 'Butter-fingers!' And shall we be worse than Amateur Bricklayers, Bat-and-Ball Lunatics, Cricketers?

Proxime accessit (he got very near the prize) was what was once written upon our noble selves at a certain classical seminary, when nothing but Jones *minus* being a better boy, prevented us from getting the Testimonial for General Good Conduct during a whole preceding half-year. We have the certificate still in our possession, with Doctor Magister Morum's own signature appended thereto—which, if he had reserved for a certain stamped document instead of using another man's, would have prevented him from leaving this country at the Queen's expense, and done him a great deal more good than it ever did us.

If it is so *very* heroic to be successful, it must be something like that to come within an inch of success. If Miss Isa Craig earned Glory by carrying away the prize—which she richly deserved—at the Crystal Palace Burns Centenary meeting, from six hundred-and-twenty competitors, Mr Frederic Myers, who was considered so nearly equal to her that the examiners had difficulty in deciding between them, ought to have had a halo or so, also, surely! Consider this young gentleman's disappointment, not to say disgust, when he discovered how near he had been to the laurel-crown and its revenue; imagine his criticisms upon the more successful lyric; pardon the language he probably indulged in within the privacy of his own apartment; and let us by all means give him a cheer. Let us applaud, too, the numerous pleasant singers—especially entitled to our courtesy, as being many of them females, and all of them with a certain feminine plaintiveness inseparable from the true poet—whose efforts, though unsuccessful, were allowed to be 'of remarkable merit'; and, in particular, let us hail those twenty-six who 'evinced much power of thought and poetic culture,' and of whom the six best were even recommended by the judges for publication. The collection just issued† of the Burns Centenary Poems, consisting, with a few exceptions, of fifty of the best unsuccessful effusions evoked by the genius of the Bard, and without, of course, so much as a thought of getting the prize-money, is really a most interesting and cheering volume. It not only forms a triumphant answer, in its wealth of thought and vigour of expression, to the rubbish about an 'iron age,' and an 'unpoetical era,' that has been pitchforked upon this country ever since the Thames Tunnel was completed, but it exhibits such a universally high standard of poetic excellence as could hardly have been expected by the most sanguine believer in our intellectual progress. We are not

* They were within a head of the Winner.

† The Burns Centenary Poems. T. Murray, Glasgow.

comparing the Tritons of the past generation with those of the present—for the Tritons did not compete in any great shoal for the Crystal Palace prize—but taking Minnow with Minnow, minor poet with minor poet, we do not believe that at any other period of our literature, fifty—no, nor five-and-twenty such good poems could have been written by as many authors upon any single subject.

It is gratifying to remark, that out of the seven best poems (including the successful one) recommended for publication, no less than four are by professional bards—that is to say, by persons who have already published a verse-volume; namely, Miss Isa Craig, Mr Gerald Massey, Mr Arthur Munby, and Mr Stanyan Bigg: a striking fact which we recommend to the notice of those who underrate the Art of writing poetry. We do not deny that there are a few rather indifferent performers among these fearless forty-five,—for five out of the fifty still withhold their names—and in particular some who make unnecessary frequent allusion to 'Coila,' and introduce a superfluity of 'urns' (for the purpose of rhyming with Burns) sufficient to stock a new necropolis; but the great excellence of others more than restores the balance, and places the average ability of the volume high indeed.

The Laureate's solemn Death-march of the Duke has no such passage, although the poems are alike in many points, as this one, culled from Mr Myers's ode, the *proxime accessit* to that of Miss Isa Craig:

O silent shapes athwart the darkening sky !
Magnificence of many folded hills,
Where the dead mist hangs, and the lone hawks cry,
Seamed with the white fall of a thousand rills ;
O lucid lakes ! serene from shore to shore,
With promontories set of solemn pines,
Broad mirrors which the pale stars tremble o'er,
Deep-drawn among the misty mountain lines ;
O holy hearths, intemerate of crime !
O tale of martyrs by the flickering sod !
O righteous race, in steadfast toil sublime !
O noblest poem, 'Let us worship God !'
Ye taught him, shaping truthful days ;
Of you he told to men, for he
From wayside reeds sweet tone could raise,
More dear than full accord of symphony,
Knowing that whatsoe'er the poet sings,
Of prototyped in nature or in man,
Moves deeply, though it touch not wrath of kings
Or frantic battle-van.

But most intent the people hears,
Tranced to silence, thrilled to tears,
When the joys of love and fears
Fall in music on their ears ;
Stirring noble sympathies,
Waking hope and high desire,
And, to introspective eyes,
Granting glimpse of Heaven's fire.

And again, what fit conclusion—

Ah ! yet we trust he findeth end to ill,
Nor in deep peace remembereth misery,
Who in the heart of his loved land is still,
Between the mountains and the clamorous sea.
There all night the deeps are loud,
Billow far to billow roaring,
But he, sleeping in his shroud,
Heareth not the waters pouring.
Yea, though the sun shall wheel a splendid form
Unseen, above the dim cloud-cataract,
Though lightnings glimmer to the rainy tract,
And all the land be wan with storm,
He knows not, wot of old to see,
In high thought severed from his kind,
Beyond the wrack Divinity,
Jehovah on the wind.

O story sadder than dethroned kings—
A poet lost to earth !
Yes, though his land in plenty sings,
Forgetful of her dearth,
And though his people in just laws is great,
And willing fealty to an equal state,
And though her commerce on all ocean thrives,
And every province swarms with happy lives,
Yet weep the great heart hidden in the sod ;
All else to man through faithful toil arrives—
The poet straight from God.

There is no doubt, indeed, from whence this young author—but seventeen years of age, as the newspapers report—for the present derives his inspirations; but we are very much mistaken if one with such a well within him of his own will be long contented to go elsewhere for the Pierian water. We hope to hear of him once more, at least, before, to use his own fine image, *his glory broadens from the plunge of death*.

Surely the Spirit, 'from whom Scotia's sons inherit their pathos and their fire,' must have dowered this modest poet, who has motto in place of name, himself not sparingly, since he can make her sing thus sweetly on the birth of Burns!

'Of old,' she saith, 'this land of mine was noted
For singers many a one ;
O'er her wild tales their rainbow-lays they floated,
Born of her storm and sun.

'I only touched them with my inspiration,
Put harps into their hands—
There was enough of love and indignation,
And legend in the land !

'To them the "gurly ocean" brought a wailing
Of girls in "kames o' goud"—
"Sir Patrick and our true loves are not sailing
Home—for the sea's their shroud !"

'The summer twilight shewed them Elfland's lady
Riding by Eildon-tree—
Sweet chimed her horse's bells through forest shady
Like the far silver sea.

'O the moss-trooper's catch of merry slaughter
Red on the diamond-dew,
Of jingling spurs by banks of Eden Water,
Green gleaves and feathers blue !

'O the sweet wish that softly dieth—dieth,
Griefless at last to be
Turf-happed and sound asleep, as she that lieth
On fair Kirkconnel-lee.

'Far from fight, frolic, wine, desire, or sorrow,
Round wild hearts, green grass ! twice,
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow
In quietness divine.
* * * *

'Why are no new songs chanted, O my singers ?
Sweet Poesy liveth yet—
Along the gray cliffs glide its sunny fingers ;
The autumnal violet

'Of sunset wraps it in the gentle weather ;
With spring's wild-rose it stirs ;
It lieth purple-rich along the heather,
And golden on the furze.

'The only ornaments it needs are lying
Around ye and above,
In stars, and hills, in human hopes undying,
In human grief, and love.

'Dear to my soul, O baby poet, rest thee,
Hush thee, my darling ! hush.
With the sweet linwhite's nature, I invest thee,
With music like the thrush.

' All Scottish legends shall thy fancy fashion,
All airs that richly flow,
Laughing with frolic, tremulous with passion,
Broken with love-lorn woe.

' Ballads, whose beauty years have long been stealing,
And left few links of gold,
Shall to thy quaint and subtle touch of healing
Seem fairer—not less old.

' Gray Cluden and the vestal's choral cadence
Thy might shall wake therewith;
Till boatmen hang their oars, to hear the maidens
Upon the moonlit Nith.

' Thine, too, the strains of battle nobly coming,
From Bruce, or Wallace wight,
Such as the Highlander shall oft be humming
Before some famous fight.

' Nor only these—for thee the hawthorn hoary
Shall in new wreaths be wrought—
The "crimson-tipped" daisy wear fresh glory,
Born of poetic thought.

' From the "wee cow'ring beastie" shalt thou borrow
A wondrous wealth of rhyme,
A noble tenderness of human sorrow,
Thou moralist sublime!

' O but the mountain breezes shall be pleasant
Upon the sunburnt braw
Of that poetic and triumphant peasant,
Driving his laurelled plough !'

Not

The wild wit that mars the holy hymning,
The stains upon the stole,
The spray-drops from the sea of passage dimming
The windows of the soul,

shall hurt the pure completeness of Robert Burns; they are but spots in the sun. In the great 'choral whole' no false notes are to be detected.

Hark! round the clay-built cot and cradle lowly
By banks of bonny Doon,
A voice of diverse songs, some wild, some holy—
A many-mingling tune.

But all at last with solemn sweet surprises
Like anthems die away—
And o'er the glee of *Tam o' Shanter* rises
The *Cotter's Saturday*.

And from a multitude beside the river,
And on the mountain sod,
Swell, and rings up, and up, as if for ever,
'Come, let us worship God !'

It is curious, but in no way difficult, to note under what great master each disciple sits. From Sydenham Vicarage—a peaceful haunt, as one would think, enough—and from a lady-poet, too, there comes this echo of the Macaulay trumpet-blare, but by no means deficient in a certain genuine ring and spirit of its own:

Veil, veil the warlike trophy;
Put shield and spear away;
Nor let the clanging armour
Wake echoes here to-day:
But bring the flail and corn-sheaf,
The scythe and ploughshare bring,
And hither call the minstrel
To touch the golden string.
Twine, twine the bay and holly,
A poet's garland twine;
For Robert Burns to-day returns,
And bids you deck his shrine.

Since, to the cotter's homestead,
Wee 'Rob the Rhymer' came,
A hundred times Auld Reekie
Hath lit the Yule-log's flame;
A hundred years have finished
Their journey round the sun;
A hundred snow-white mantles
For earth hath Winter spun;
A hundred times our father,
He of the noiseless hands,
His scythe hath whet, his glass hath set—
The glass with ceaseless sands.

T. Watson, of Arbroath, also begins his melody in spirited ballad-cadence:

Leave ye now the laurel growing,
Break no holly boughs to-day;
Evermore the 'leaves and berries'
Round his head will rustling play.
Bring ye but the flowering aloe,
Add it to the wreath he wears,
For the tree that fadeth never
Blooms but in a hundred years !

But this promise of his opening lines is scarce redeemed by the entire poem.

Mrs Alfred Munster of Belfast has, in our judgment, of all the songsters from the Sister Island, the strongest wing and blitheest note, and we fitly conclude our extracts from a few of her spirited verses:

O brother! the birk and heather that wave on thine
own wild hills,
The broom knows, and the gowan shaws, and the
songs of the mountain rills;
The rosy-fringed, gold-eyed daisies, the corn on the
sloping leas—
How can the world forget thee, whose songs were of
themes like these ?

Never a dew-drop glistened, on the pearl-white buds of
the thorn,
Never a glad lark singing, soared to the gates of morn,
Never a soft glance met thee, never a deed of wrong,
But the shrine in thy breast gave upward its incense
of burning song.

The golden fields of the harvest, the sough of the wind
at night,
The glens and streams where the stars look down with
a weird and wavering light,
The commonest things of nature, the scenes we pass
heedless by,
Grew lovely, and grand, and glorious, in the light of
thy poet-eye.

Who shall presume to judge thee? Is it the calm, cold
voice
Of him who smiles when his neighbour mourns, or
frowns when the poor rejoice?
Is it the sainted icebergs, armed without and within,
That shall close in thy face the door of life, and mark
thee a child of sin?

Is it the temperate pulses, that ne'er in their wildest
heat
Could dream of a throb akin to thine, in its tempestuous beat?
Is it the well-trained Christians, shielded from sin and
shame,
Who, false to the law their Master taught, will ban the
dead poet's name?

This lady was only not among the 'highly commended,' we fancy, because she has not fulfilled the conditions of the givers of the prize in respect to the length of her poem. We can hardly overpraise the discretion exhibited by the judges, Messrs Monckton Milnes, Tom Taylor, and Theodore Martin (to whom

this volume is properly inscribed), in selecting the grain from the chaff, or rather the large grain from the small grain, nor do we find scarce a single instance wherein our own humble judgment would reverse their decision.

What dreadful things those 'dauntless three' must have had to 'go through' in the reading of those other Six Hundred! We ourselves are not without a touch of vertigo after these fifty. Burns, ears, learns, turns, urns—the whole line out of Walker's *Rhyming Dictionary*—revolve in our sated ears like a Merry-go-round in the worst of spirits. How did the three decide, we wonder, in the case of *Craig v. Myers*, since their unequal number precluded the otherwise obvious expedient of tossing for the victor—"Man or woman?" What precautions have they taken against the personal vengeance of their Six-hundred-and-twenty deadly enemies, and does Mr Monckton Milnes wear medieval chain-armour beneath his nineteenth-century waistcoat?

A number of interesting questions, in short, arise, which we should be much gratified by their answering; but, in the meantime, about one thing there can be no sort of question at all; if they did not equal the patience of Job—who, by the by, was never tried in this manner—*proxime accesserunt*, they fell very little short of that Patriarch.

FRENCH RAILWAY BENEVOLENCE.

THERE was lately a dinner given in London by a Railway Benevolent Society, the object of which is to afford relief to the workmen employed on the railways of England. We do not doubt that the gentlemen who compose it have undertaken a work not less necessary than meritorious; but we venture to offer the great companies with which they are connected a hint which, derived from our Gallican neighbours, may be with great advantage adopted here. If we might venture to be hypercritical, we would suggest that English charity is too fond of putting its hand in its pocket; freely and nobly indeed, but sometimes not with the best results. The virtue of almsgiving is in no country in Europe so extensively and generally exercised as in England. There is no form of misery for which public charity has not provided a refuge; and when exceptional cases, which general rules cannot include, come to light, private munificence is ever ready to give every assistance. Of late years, the insufficiency of this is beginning to be felt; and, imitating the worthy examples of some other lands, many have been found to devote a portion of their time to seek out and assuage the wretchedness which shrinks from public gaze. Still, our charity is wanting in ingenuity.

We desire now to call attention to a great commercial corporation, which is happily distinguished by having taken the initiative in ameliorating the position of its servants, and by the success which has attended its efforts. The problem was a difficult one to solve; for, on the one hand, it was sought to provide every aid which could be required, and, on the other, to do so in a way which should not interfere with individual liberty and the feeling of independence. We extract our narrative from the report of a commission to inquire into the regulation of French railways, with the object of devising means to prevent a recurrence of the disastrous accidents which occurred towards the end of the year 1853. It enters fully into the precautions adopted to insure individual safety, and it also details at length the efforts made by the various great companies to promote the well-being of the vast numbers they employ.

The report places in a striking light the really noble ideas which have inspired the administrators of these greatest of national workshops. It shews them seek-

ing something more than merely to secure the largest possible amount of dividend for their shareholders, and yet even in this they are more successful than our own railways, since their shares stand at an average premium of more than 30 per cent. The shares of the railway of which we are about to speak are at more than 150 per cent. premium. They consider themselves as the natural guardians of the servants they employ, and, as such, bound to introduce among them those charitable institutions which Christian ingenuity has devised for the assistance of the more helpless classes.

To the Orleans Railway, and to M. Polonceau, their chief engineer, is due the honour of having led the way, and of obtaining the greatest results from these liberal ideas. M. Polonceau, in daily contact with all classes of workmen and servants, did not content himself with the strict line of his duty, which would have confined his attention to the locomotives, the carriages, and the rails; nor did his humanity wait for the appeals which accidents might make to it. He early felt himself called upon to organise efficient medical aid to relieve the sufferers from accidents and illness, and, step by step, his solicitude extended itself to other objects. He has now established, for the benefit of the *employés* of his railway, in addition to a complete medical service, a fund for advances in case of sickness or misfortune, a dépôt of clothing, magazines of food, and, finally, a refectory or gigantic eating-house.

To each of the principal stations medical men are attached, who give daily consultations to such as can come to them in rooms appropriated for this purpose. Others are visited at their own homes; and to all, the medicines prescribed are delivered gratis. Workmen hurt in the service, receive, until their complete recovery, the full pay which they drew in health; and the sick are allowed two francs a day, which is about half the average amount of their wages. In the last year, 2500 persons were cared for by the medical officers of the Orleans Railway, 1900 of whom were not workmen, but members of their families. The cost of medicines and their preparation was about £600.

The next step in this organisation of benevolence was the formation of a committee of the superior officers of the company, to visit the homes of the workmen. Each member is charged with a certain number of visits, the results of which are reported at the next meeting, when such aid as seems advisable is voted either in money or goods. 1243 families were thus visited in the winter months of 1857 and 1858, to more than half of whom succours averaging £3 each were voted, at a total cost of more than £2000. It is needless for us to remark that such visits do a greater good than merely relieving physical distress; nor is it the poor alone who profit by them. The moral effect of this contact of the employed with their superiors, produces a kindly feeling equally beneficial to both.

There are at the three principal stations dépôts of food and clothing, where everything that can be kept in store is laid in at wholesale prices, and, as far as possible, directly from the producers, without the intervention of brokers or middlemen. They are retailed at cost-price, with a fractional addition to pay the expenses; and the effect is, that some articles the railway servants obtain at an economy of 75 per cent. upon the usual retail price, while the average profit on all is 25 per cent. Thus, a railway servant lives for one-fourth less than other workmen, as if a fourth were actually added to his income. What is especially worthy of remark is, that these advantages are not offered as a charity, and still further are they removed from the truck-system. The company neither loses nor gains on the transaction, but it uses the immense funds at

its command to place its servants in the position of members of a great wholesale firm, and this for almost every article of household consumption. The management of these dépôts is very simple. Each workman is provided with a book or *livret*, in which a sum proportioned to his daily or monthly wages is inscribed. Everything that is furnished is marked in this book, and entered in a register kept for this purpose; and when the credit is exhausted, the supply also is stopped until a fresh sum becomes due. The benefits to be derived from these magazines are by no means confined to the workmen of the three principal stations where they are established: the station-masters all along the line are authorised to forward three times a month the requisitions of the different employés under them. The orders are enclosed in a basket destined to this special service, and in which the articles required are packed, each separately addressed to the person for whom it had been asked. In 1857, L40,000 was the cost of articles of food, and L.9000 that of the clothing supplied.

In the last place, M. Polonceau has established a kitchen or refectory at Ivry, the Paris station. It is under the care of religious women of the order of St Vincent de Paul, and is supplied with respect to articles in store from the magazines of the company, and as to meat, bread, and fresh vegetables from the Paris market. The refectory is open from seven in the morning till eight at night, and the food supplied can either be eaten there or carried away, so as to offer cheap and good cookery, not only to the workmen, but also to their families. The payments are made in counters, of which a certain number is given at a time on demand, and charged on the *livret*. When we state that an excellent dinner can be had in this refectory for 5d., including wine and bread, some of our readers will suspect us of romancing; but if we give the bill of fare, many an unfortunate writer in the *Times*, whose wife perennially starves him on roast mutton or boiled beef, will envy the better-fed workmen on the Orleans Railway. The bill of fare comprises various soups, and all kinds of butcher-meat, dressed in all ways, roast, stewed, or in ragout; the vegetables in season—or in winter, preserved vegetables—and properly dressed, not washed in boiling water, as is the English fashion; cheese, fruits, and even preserves. For a penny, the workman can have 3 oz. of bread and 15 oz. of soup. Each portion of meat weighing about 5 oz. costs a penny, and portion of vegetables, a halfpenny; so that a dinner comprising soup, two dishes of meat, a dish of vegetables, and half a pint of wine, will cost in all 4½d. In eleven months, the expenditure of the refectory was L.4025, of which L.418 went for service, washing, &c. The receipts were L.4046, so that there was a profit of L.21 on the year's outlay.

No one is required to make use of the privileges offered to him; each one is at liberty to buy cheaply or not as he will; but the men have not been slow to appreciate the advantages held out to them, and the result has been all that could be desired. It has entirely put a stop to the *vidé cabaret*, pot-house life, which is the bane of the working-classes in France, as the beer-shop is their ruin in England. The men have grown domestic, and live with their families. Instead of carousing in the inn, they sit at home, or make each other visits, and indulge their hospitable feelings by offering not the *goutte* or the *verre de vin*, but chocolate.

M. Polonceau is able to conclude his report by stating that his charity is, as well-ordered charity always is, a good-paying speculation. Both the morals and the health of his men have improved, and with them the quality of their work.

This kitchen seems to us a very admirable idea. It is by no means eleemosynary, as has been shewn, and it might surely be adopted with advantage, both at the great railway stations, and in the large centres of population, such as Manchester and Sheffield. To insure success, it must be conducted on the same principles as this one at Ivry, when only one regulation is enforced, the limiting the supply of wine to one pint per meal. The good-behaviour of the visitors is trusted to themselves, and they give no cause for complaint.

NUISANCES.

Am I to become the sport of my nerves? Am I to be a slave to my senses of sight, smell, and hearing? Or am I to stand up against the encroaching power of these four secondary parts of my mental and physical organisation, and to say boldly, I will acknowledge no government but that of my head and my heart? Am I to try everything by the eternal standard of self—the everlasting me—and to ignore all that is done by my fellow-creatures, unless it happens to harmonise with my own petty tastes and feelings? Who am I, what am I, that I should set myself up as the judge of what is correct and agreeable—the putter-down and mover-on of what is improper, or repugnant to my standard of taste? What is my standard of taste? Is it something infallible—something that may be trusted under every change of circumstances, every variation of temperature, every condition of bodily feeling, or is it not rather the slave of all these things, a compound of physical weakness and mental prejudice? What right have I, a poor, weak, erring, insignificant atom upon the great earth, to sit in judgment upon anything, and call it a positive nuisance? A floor-cloth manufactory—is that a nuisance? Not absolutely or altogether so. The smell of the paint acts differently upon different constitutions; and although I cannot say that it excites in me any very agreeable sensation, I know that an open gas-pipe does, and I have a right, therefore, to assume that all men are not disgusted with a floor-cloth manufactory. Anyway, there are the work-people and their families—and no mean number of these things are to be settled by majorities—who would be sorry to hear that the nuisance which provides them with bread was put down according to act of parliament.

The fat man, with the broad, opaque back, who always sits before me in a theatre, and interferes with my personal comfort in a public conveyance, becomes at times such an intolerable nuisance, that if I were to give way to the savage impulses of my nature, I should smite him down with the first destructive instrument at hand. A little reflection, a little communion with my better humanity, convinces me, however, that he is a far greater nuisance to himself than he is to those around him, and that I am not altogether guiltless of various little acts of an annoying character by which I irritate him, and deprive myself of the pure right of complaint. At the theatre, my sharp, attenuated knees painfully penetrate his yielding back; and in the omnibus, the hard, keen angles of my pocket-book, or my snuff-box, find a resting-place in the soft substance of his incomprehensible sides. As I see him writhing in perspiring agony in the boiling caldron of a crowded, unventilated stage-pit—in the close, musty depths of a

public vehicle—or waddling as the butt and football of every hurrying passenger on the queen's highway—my antagonism is disarmed, and I pass him tenderly, as I should one who was blind.

Slow people in the streets are nuisances, especially the two young ladies and their dowager-mamma, who will walk three abreast with a snail-like movement almost imperceptible to the naked eye. If I gave way to my feelings as I hasten to attain a given point by a certain time, I should unceremoniously break the self-complacent line of the fair promenaders, and scatter them on each side to the gutter and the wall; but a glance backward at the indignant faces of the persons whom I have rudely passed, convinces me that my haste is a greater nuisance to society at large, than the calm tardiness of the three ladies who form an elegant barrier across the footway.

The street-vendor of hardware, who stands at my area-railings with a couple of tea-trays under his arm, which it is a gross, unpardonable insult to my taste to suppose that, under any circumstances, I shall buy, appears a thorough nuisance to my one-sided vision, when he will not move on, under repeated hostile signs, which I make to him from behind the blind of my dining-room window. But if I have the heart, or take the trouble to look at the other side of this nuisance—the side that is not immediately presented to my sight—I shall see, in all probability, an anxious, struggling, itinerant trader, with a small capital, moving from house to house, in search of a humble living for the family dependent upon him. As he passes up one hard, unsympathising street, and down another, meeting with nothing but closed doors, and the eternal hasty shake of the frowning head, it may be that, in his melancholy reflections, society appears to be a greater nuisance to him than he ever appears to be to society. If I changed places with him this instant, should I conduct myself with more propriety of demeanour? should I carefully draw the line at that nice point where praiseworthy perseverance ends, and troublesome impertinence begins, with the ever-increasing cry for bread, bread, bread, ringing unceasingly in my ears?

Let any man whose nervous system is cultivated to the highest pitch of sensitiveness, try to see in the noisy huckster of the streets a fellow-labourer, whose lot has fallen upon more stony ground, and he will hear from that moment a plaintive music in the most uncouth sounds that ever issued from the lips of street-trader or street-minstrel. There will be an end to those fretful starts of impatience when the sharp, short, quick beats of the Indian tom-tom burst upon the ear, and he will learn to look with pity upon the poor copper-coloured performer who chants his wild lay in calico and a March wind. Rude and unmusical the performance may be, but not more so than Professor Gamma's illustrations of Greek harmony, to which the learned flock in crowds, and in the crabbed, four-note combinations of which they affect to discover a simple melody that is not altogether displeasing to the ear. I have had my horror of the oriental nuisance long ago, but it fled before a day-dream picture of myself in Singapore—the temperature lowered to freezing-point, the European population rooted out, and I singing, to an unsympathising populace, for my daily food and my nightly bed, one of the wild songs of my native land.

The organ nuisance, I must say, never annoyed me, because I am not a learned and indefatigable man, like my neighbour, Dr M'Verbose, who is preparing his great work upon the currency for a not over-expectant public. He is continually calling in the assistance of the Vandal policeman to stop the *Casta Diva* abruptly in the middle, because the subtle theories of a man who is about to open up upon paper unbounded supplies of paper-wealth to pacify

the insatiable hunger of the directors of a delusive commerce, cannot be properly worked out while an Italian scene is being performed upon a barrel-organ under the window, with a fluto-harmonicon accompaniment. A nuisance, no doubt, to Dr M'Verbose is that poor, pinched, dirty-faced, slouched-hatted, idiotic, smiling, nodding, mechanically-musical emigrant from the sweet south; but a far greater nuisance to a large circle is the learned doctor—even before his great work is published—without having the excuse of the Italian, that he is fighting for a living. The nuisance of the organ-player begins and ends in himself, but the nuisance of Dr M'Verbose and his theories will become multiplied in the persons of a hundred active disciples. As for me, I am content to stop for a time the working of the mental mill, and look out into the falling snow, to dream, as I listen to the melodies of the Italian composer, of a land where the people live in contented idleness under the sun, where the street-minstrel is welcomed by young and old, and not moved-on by every uncongenial hermit who dwells in the social isolation of eight rooms and a kitchen.

In nothing are men so inconsistent as in their horror of nuisances, the most sensitive being usually the greatest offenders. The hardened snuff-taker, who sneezes with the roar of a wild beast in the middle of a solemn service, will leap off his chair at the sound of a postman's knock; and the man whose nerves are irritated by the ringing of church-bells, will play complacently upon the bagpipes in the bosom of his family.

THE PEARLS.

ACCEPT, Lezel, this simple gift,
These faintly blushing pearls;
They may have graced the syren's bower,
Or peeped from mermaid's curls.

But though from syren's coral bower,
Or mermaid's rifled hair,
They'll not regret their late retreat,
Accepted by my fair !

If missed the sea-nymph's melting song,
When love inflames her breast,
Sweet maid, they'll have no cause to sigh,
Allowed on thine to rest !

Thy cheek will shame the hue that tints
Their shield of softest light;
Thy beauty-moulded neck of snow
Will make them dark as night.

Kissed by thy gold-tinged chesnut hair,
Touched by the fingers small,
Rocked in the dimples of thy breast,
They'll smiling rise and fall.

Accept then, love, this simple gift,
These faintly blushing pearls;
That may have graced the syren's bower,
Or slept in mermaid's curls.

JOHN ELLIS.

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